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ON READING FREUD

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There are many ways to read Freud, perhaps as many as there are readers. While profoundly influential, his work has inspired the widest range of response: from loyal followers, to minor theory tinkerers, to radical deviationists, to outright enemies. Those who work directly with psychoanalytic theory have done so from a variety of positions, ranging from the scientific-reductionistic to the existential-humanistic. The scientifically inclined strive to "objectify" Freud's ideas, to translate them into a language of neurophysiology (or some related modern version: computer terminology, information or general systems theory.) At the other extreme are those who would dispense with theory entirely in favor of some sort of living-feeling in the immediate moment. And then there are the orthodox -- the conservators -- who attempt to preserve all that Freud said in one vast, many-flavored, talmudic stew. What is true of theory is true of clinical practice as well. Psychoanalysis is the starting point for all contemporary types of psychotherapy, which have flowered forth in a great variety of forms.

Freud's work lends itself to these many different responses because of its richness and complexity. The range of his interest was so wide, his imagination so fertile, and his style of writing so many-faceted that one repeatedly has the experience of developing a

* Chapter 1 of Freud's Unfinished Journey: Conflict Between Conventional and Critical Paradigms in Psychoanalytic Theory.

new line of thought only to discover that he anticipated it, or said the same thing in slightly different words. One can find support for a great number of positions -- even contradictory positions, -- somewhere in Freud's writings.

All of this is to say that one cannot simply read Freud and discover what he is saying -- or undertake psychoanalytic training and learn what he "really" meant or acquire the single valid version of psychoanalysis. One reads him from some particular perspective, and this perspective has much to do with what one takes from the reading. The reading is a work of interpretation and, like any interpretation, it arises from the framework of the interpreter. But it is precisely here -- when one attempts to specify the framework within which to comprehend psychoanalysis -- that difficulties arise. Is psychoanalysis a science, to be understood, tested and validated in accord with the rules and procedures of physics, chemistry, biology, geology or astronomy? Or is it an art form with its own esthetic truths to which the canons of science are inapplicable? Should we move toward the validation of psychoanalytic hypotheses by controlled observation and experiment, or can these truths be known only in the clinical context -- in the ongoing process of psychoanalytic therapy -- from which they arose? Or perhaps psychoanalysis is neither science nor art, but simply an applied medical-psychological specialty, its essence the healing of personal suffering. Or, in a very different way, perhaps it is a philosophy of life, a system of moral and ethical ideas and values that guide our understanding of the great existential issues. Or perhaps it is all of these? Or none of them.

Let us be sure that the issue under discussion is clear. In some ways, all of the above are true of psychoanalysis: it has some of the qualities of a science, it is an applied art with its own form and procedures, it is a medical-psychological specialty, it is a system of values and has many of the characteristics of a philosophy of life. In all these ways it both shares features with other disciplines and develops new approaches, new lines of thought. But when we attempt to assess psychoanalysis -- to determine the validity of its propositions, hypotheses and theories, or decide between alternative explanations -- we become aware of the inadequacy or inappropriateness of traditional approaches. It is my belief that, beyond the features it may share with science, with applied or healing arts, or with western philosophical value systems, psychoanalysis constitutes a unique endeavor that cannot be fully comprehended within the terms of these familiar disciplines. Further, I believe the failure to apprehend and explicitly formulate the unique nature of psychoanalysis has led to numerous unresolved arguments and disagreements, conflicts that very much persist among contemporary psychoanalysts. I hope, in what follows, to clarify these conflicts by examining the assumptions and methods that make this approach to the human condition unique.

The core of the problem is the mixture of old and new values and models underlying Freud's work. Let us begin by looking at the cultural and historical context in which Freud lived, the starting place for psychoanalytic theory. Since a great deal has been written about this I need only touch on the main features in the

briefest manner. Freud was educated in the liberal-rationalist tradition and, while a cultural Jew, he proclaimed his atheism: throughout his life his intellectual allegiance was to science and reason. Indeed, his medical and research education imbued him with a commitment to physicalist science -- that materialist system of values and priorities that persists to the present, not only in many fields of psychology and social science but also, within psychoanalysis, in those drawn to neurophysiological and other mechanistic translations of theory. We know, too, that Freud was a product of nineteenth-century European society, a society that, despite many democratic reforms, remained male supremacist. Freud's views on men and women -- on the essence of masculinity-femininity -- grew from this patriarchal Victorian soil and, while they moved some distance from it, were never completely uprooted. Along with the influence of this male-centered system of values, Freud was inevitably influenced by other assumptions and values of his culture, chief among them a belief in the necessity of hard work and the renunciation of pleasure. That he was, in many ways, a most conventional bourgeois citizen, can be clearly seen in his personal life: his sexual control and inhibitions, the long and distant courtship of his wife, the conventional life style, his professional ambition and concern for a prestigious position, his long and regular working hours, even his patriotic fervor at the outset of the First World War.

In these ways he was very much a man -- and I stress man -- of his times, as seen in his childhood identification with the explorer-general Hannibal and his later view of himself as a

"conquistador." And he could be very much the "Herr Doktor Profesor," concerned with the priorities of his discoveries, his image and his status. Yet his creation -- psychoanalysis -- is a most revolutionary challenge to all these beliefs and values. It poses the unconscious as a powerful rival to reason and opens up the realm of the infantile, emotional and feminine that lie behind adult masculine veneers. From the beginning, psychoanalytic work contains an implicit challenge to conventional values and, in the late essays, this trend is developed into a powerful critique of modern society. This brings me to key point: Freud is a transitional figure between the traditional values of nineteenth and early twentieth century western society, and a radically new set of values -- a very different paradigm, world view, guiding image or framework -- which he creates in psychoanalysis, both as theory and method. We may contrast the old and new paradigms -- the conventional nineteenth century western world view with the new psychoanalytic one -- in three spheres. First, where the conventional position values science, objectivity and the life of reason, the psychoanalytic view stresses the power of the unconscious, of instinct, intuition, the emotional and subjective. It does not glorify or worship these qualities but alerts us to their importance and the necessity of coming to terms with them, of striking a balance between reason and feeling, the objective and subjective. Second, where the conventional position is male-centered, psychoanalysis makes us aware of psychological bisexuality, with the way each outward form of exaggerated sexual identity has its opposite, unconscious, side. Related to this, psychoanalytic exploration eventually leads to a deeper valuing of

"feminine-maternal" qualities -- feeling, intuition, love, caring, softness -- long depreciated by the male dominated state. And, finally, where the conventional view is just that: conventional -- where it promotes conformity to the mores of established society and adherence to the work ethic which dictates the renunciation of pleasure and a future-time orientation, Freud eventually enunciated a profoundly critical view of these values. In the final chapters of Civilization and Its Discontents, he points to just this work ethic -- in the form of the harsh and punitive superego -- as a principal source of the unhappiness and neurotic suffering of civilized man. For purposes of discussion we may abbreviate these three areas of transition in world view as: from science to psychoanalysis, from male-centered to bisexual, and from conventional to critical.

I have said that Freud is a transitional figure between these two world views and noted how his conventional personal life contrasts with the revolutionary character of psychoanalysis as method and theory. But it was not just his life style that conflicted with the radical nature of the new theory and method he developed -- for that would be of no more than minor biographical significance. The conflict -- the unresolved ambivalence, if I may apply one of his own concepts to him -- runs throughout much of psychoanalytic theory. That is to say, while Freud is a transitional figure between conventional views and the new insights that he, more than anyone else, enables us to see, the transition is never fully realized in his own work. There is a continual mixing of old and new assumptions, of progress to a fresh viewpoint and regression to the old, of radically new modes of

understanding stated in a cumbersome language of the past. Hence, the unfinished journey.

Freud began his professional career in neurological research and, in The Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895), attempted to formulate his developing theoretical ideas as a neurological model of the mind. In this model he tried to explain the psychological phenomena that concerned him -- consciousness and the unconscious, pleasure and pain, imagination and rational thought -- by positing physical-neurological processes as the underlying "basis". His commitment to this reductive approach stemmed from his medical-scientific training and, especially, the influences absorbed in Brücke's neurological laboratory. But, even at this early stage of his work, Freud recognized the inadequacy of this approach and he never published The Project. In his next major work, The Interpretation of Dreams, of 1900, Freud moves entirely onto "psychological ground." As he states in the opening lines of that great work, its purpose is to:

" . . . bring forward proof that there is a psychological technique which makes it possible to interpret dreams, and that, if that procedure is employed, every dream reveals itself as a psychical structure which has a meaning and which can be inserted at an assignable point in the mental activities of waking life." (p. 1)

Dreams, associations and related aspects of the dreamer's life history are fit within the framework of a psychological theory, one that deals with meaning, interpretations, and symbolism. Dreams are decoded in terms of their symbolic meaning in relation to current

and distant aspects of the dreamer's life, and in relation to major motivational conflicts. Nowhere in The Interpretation of Dreams -- nor in all of Freud's work that followed -- was anything remotely neurological or physiological observed, nor was there ever any attempt to coordinate the theory with ongoing research in neurophysiology. In both his work with patients and the hypotheses he developed, Freud had left the neurological laboratory and entered the world of psychoanalysis.

Yet, when he came to formulate a general theory a curious regression took place. In the final chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams, the model of the mind developed in the earlier Project, along with most of its reductive and mechanistic assumptions, finds its way back onto the purported psychological ground of the new approach. Chapter 7 contains the first major statement of what comes to be known as psychoanalytic "metapsychology": a general theory whose concepts include psychic or libidinal energy, pleasure as energy discharge and pain as the accumulation of energy, the investment of this energy in "objects" (cathexis), barriers to energy discharge, and related notions. In the metapsychology, the assumptions -- and even many of the specific "mechanisms" and terms -- originally formulated in the neurological model of The Project, were surreptitiously brought back into the new psychological theory.¹

As James Strachey puts it:

"... the Project, or rather its invisible ghost, haunts the whole series of Freud's theoretical writings to the very end."
(1966 p. 290).

The persistence of the neurological model -- with all its reductive trappings, its language of energies, discharge, mechanisms and objects -- in the "new" metapsychology is a major example of the way in which conventional concepts and values were mixed in with Freud's developing work. The metapsychology has remained a powerful influence, both as a theory itself and by the spread of its language into other key areas. What is more, the problems created by the mixture of old and new paradigms is not confined to the metapsychology or to areas directly infused with it. One encounters versions of this same problem in many other core topics: the theory of sexuality, hypotheses concerning the cause of neurosis, the model of anxiety, and conceptions of aggression and death. In each of these areas, new psychoanalytic insights are confounded with conventional values and assumptions, creating theoretical ambiguity and confusion that continues to the present.

Freud's first ideas concerning the role of sexuality in neurosis were clearly influenced by the sexual prejudices of his day. According to such views, sexual pleasure was a dangerous force which had to be carefully controlled. Masturbation was seen as the cause of all sorts of weakness and illness -- both physical and moral -- and "good" women were supposed to lack sexual interest, or, indeed, passion of any sort. The picture of Victorian sexual life is well known. Freud's earliest theories of the role of sexuality in the creation of neurotic symptoms arose from these ideas; he believed that excessive masturbation led to a kind of psychic weakness while not enough of the right kind of sexual discharge could be equally pathological.

He even invented a diagnostic category -- "actual neurosis" -- in which dammed up sex in the literal physical sense, was supposed to result in neurotic symptoms. In his early hypotheses, anxiety -- which was frequently observed in the neurotic patients -- was thought to be a secondary result of misdirected sex, a sort of overflow of improperly channeled sexual energy.

The theories of sexuality, anxiety and neurosis all underwent a series of major transformations from their conventional origins. Freud discovered the importance of traumatic sexual experiences in childhood, then later came to believe these did not occur but were creations of the child's sexual wishes and fantasies. From the early ideas concerning the "appropriate" discharge of sexual energy, came the central psychoanalytic theory of repression and defense, a theory which focuses on inner conflict between sexual wishes and moral strictures. The theory of anxiety also underwent a major transformation. From the early view in which anxiety was seen as a by-product of sexual discharge, there eventually developed a very different theory, one in which anxiety was viewed as the prior condition, "signal", and motive for neurotic symptoms, inhibitions and defenses.

Freud's theories became a major challenge to the oppressive sexual hypocrisy of the Victorian age, psychoanalysis a major source of liberation from excessive guilt, crippling sexual inhibitions, and conventional prejudice. If we do not, today, view masturbation and infantile sexuality with horror, if we are more open-minded about a range of adult erotic activities -- both hetero and homo sexual --, and if we have abandoned the Victorian ideal of the passionless

female, we have Freud, and the many who followed in his path, to thank.

Yet, paradoxically, Freud's own theories of sexuality, neurosis and anxiety -- as well as his conceptions of masculinity-- femininity, bisexuality and women -- were never completely liberated from their conventional origins. The "invisible ghost" of nineteenth century sexual prejudice continues to haunt these theories, just as the ghost of The Project haunts the metapsychology. Sexuality -- usually disguised in an abstract language of "libidinal energy", "id" and "instinct" -- is viewed as a disruptive force within the person. Women are seen as morally inferior, and "passive-feminine" sexuality as a particularly dangerous inner temptation. In these ways, the conventional picture of sexuality was carried forth in the new theory in disguised form.

Similar ambiguities and confusions -- again due to the incomplete transition in paradigms -- are found in other areas. The relative significance of sexual traumas and sexual wishes in the causation of neurosis never receives satisfactory theoretical treatment. And, while anxiety is given a more central position in the late essay devoted to it, this conception does not fully penetrate the larger theoretical structure. Similar difficulties cloud the theories of bisexuality and aggression and can be found in the conceptions of separation, loss and death. In each case, there is a paradoxical mixture of conventional male-centered assumptions and radical new psychoanalytic insights. In all these areas, the transition from the old to the new paradigms remains unfinished. I will present a detailed analysis of each of these areas in subsequent

chapters with the hope of resolving these ambiguities and contradictions.

A related mixture of ideas and assumptions may be found in conceptions of psychoanalysis as a method of treatment. It began as a medical speciality, evolved through hypnosis and suggestion, and became something quite unique. Yet certain of the terms and beliefs associated with its medical-scientific origins remained -- including the idea of "curing" patients of a presumed disease. While committed psychoanalytic therapists know they are engaged in an interpersonal enterprise of a very special nature, difficulties have remained in finding an adequate language to describe the process, a language that does not mix in inappropriate assumptions from other fields. In this sphere, too, the problem arises from a failure to complete the transition from the old to the new world view, from a mixture of paradigms.

Everyone who today deals with the phenomena from which Freud fashioned psychoanalytic theory -- that is, all who explore the world of the unconscious, either in themselves or others; who work at psychoanalytic therapy, or one of its many variants; who encounter the pain, anxiety, guilt, depression and "symptoms" of psychological disturbance in its many forms -- are confronted with the same difficulties and dilemmas that Freud faced. For while our society has changed in many ways since Victorian days, reason, objectivity and science remain powerful ideals, as do the dictates of work and conventionality. And, while there is much ferment around male supremacy and women's rights, it remains to be seen whether this will result in a shift of values from those traditionally associated with

masculinity, aggression and competition to those bound up with femininity, love and maternal care. The dominant value structure of our society has not changed much since Freud's time, the life of reason, work, clearly defined sex roles and conventionality hold sway over any serious valuing of ecstatic experience, bisexuality, or a truly critical examination of our culture. The problems he faced in formulating a new psychoanalytic world view remain our problems still. Insofar as we understand these issues within Freud's work, we will be better able to understand their current versions in our own work and lives.

In the chapters that follow, the consideration of Freud's unfinished journey will take us across a wide range of topics. I will begin with a general discussion of the role of paradigms or world views and then explore the essential features of the dominant world view of the modern state, what I will term man-against-nature. This will lead to a consideration of the ideals of science and objectivity and their place in that world view. An attempt will then be made to distinguish psychoanalysis from science, and to specify its unique features. In part, the psychoanalytic approach can be characterized by its lack of commitment to any particular paradigm; it strives to understand paradigms -- both personal and social -- from an outside or "metaparadigmatic" position. To do this, one must set aside, at least temporarily, conventional values and assumptions. One strives toward the recognition of multiple truths and the critical-comparative evaluation of different ways of life.

Freud began his work in the male-centered world of nineteenth century Europe, a world that thought of man at war with nature and in

conflict with the instinctual core of his own nature. This was a paradigm that valued men over women, "masculine" qualities over the "feminine," work over the erotic, and science, reason and objectivity over intuition, emotion and subjective experience. We will see how Freud begins with a commitment to these assumptions and develops a method that takes him to a very different position, one associated with both sides of these dichotomies. He plunges into the unconscious, the world of dreams, self-analysis, transference and countertransference, neurotic suffering and insanity. And in this realm, he discovers the psychological underworld of respectable society, he comes face-to-face with the cost in personal pain -- in anxiety, guilt, self-hatred and neurotic misery -- that results from his society's dominant way of life. His journey, begun to understand neurosis and relieve the suffering of his patients, took him to a much more revolutionary set of insights than he was prepared for. He was then in conflict with the very substance of his own way of life, as anyone is who makes revolutionary discoveries.

The ambiguities of psychoanalytic theory result primarily from this conflict between old and new paradigms. In his writings, Freud is continually moving forward in radical directions and retreating to safe conventional ground, first revealing material that raises the most critical questions about his society's values and practices and then slipping back to side with those very values against society's victims. This unresolved conflict is played out in all the major areas of Freud's work: it is not confined to the metapsychology -- though one finds it there in a striking way -- but runs through the

case studies, the theories of sexuality, neurosis and anxiety, and the conceptions of masculinity-femininity, bisexuality, aggression, loss, separation and death. I will discuss all of these areas in the chapters that follow, concluding with a close analysis of Civilization and Its Discontents, the work in which Freud comes closest to resolving the conflicts that run throughout his theories.

CODA

During a recent session with a patient in psychoanalysis I had an experience that I am sure occurs to all therapists from time to time. As I sat listening, I became aware of feeling completely lost amidst the maze of symptoms, dreams, associations and transference reactions: do I really understand any of this, I thought? This was a patient I knew well, a patient that I usually understood in a relatively clear way. Yet in this session, all that understanding seemed arbitrary, all past interpretations questionable. It then struck me -- as I am sure it has many psychoanalysts before -- what an amazing achievement Freud's creation of psychoanalysis was. How did he ever understand all this -- the unconscious, the complications of neurosis and character, the subtle intricacies of transference -- the first time around? Here I was, feeling at a loss to understand a patient, yet I had the benefit of all of Freud's discoveries, as well as the contributions of the very many others who have elaborated and built on the structure he created. He had none of this, no teachers, no supervisors, no reliable theoretical guidelines -- indeed he had to ignore the misleading ideas and practices of the psychiatry of his

time -- as he invented, modified and elaborated psychoanalysis. He was a true genius: mankind is fortunate if one like him appears once in a century.

I do not mention Freud's genius here simply as a bit of hero-worship, but to clarify the stance toward him and his theories that will be taken in the present work. I believe his ideas are best approached with a critical spirit, yet I fear that some will feel this implies that Freud should have done things differently, that he is to be blamed for the ambiguities and conflicts -- for the mixture of old and new world views -- that characterize so much of psychoanalytic theory. This misses the point. Freud's contribution to our understanding of ourselves is much greater than anyone could possibly ask for. But it would be a betrayal of his own approach if we were to enshrine him as an infalliable authority. The understanding of human psychology remains a difficult enterprise: we need as much clarity as we can achieve. Psychoanalytic theory contains such vital insights that it is worth extracting them from their often ambiguous surroundings. As we pursue this critical approach, we can be guided by Freud's own example: for he taught us to question, to look beneath surface appearances, to tease out underlying meaning, to continually modify theory in response to new observations, and to never accept the authority of a person or a theory because it occupies a position of authority: and that must include the authority of Freud's own genius.

FOOTNOTES

1. A number of recent papers and books treat this issue with Pribram and Gill, 1976, being the most detailed. See also: Amacher, 1965; Holt, 1965; and Gill and Holtzman, 1976.